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ROAD CONDITIONS (Jordan/Levant/Iraq)

16478

1. "Well we've made it--Jerusalem to Baghdad by a long and circuitous route in the trusty old jeep. Seems nothing short of a miracle, looking back on the eighteen days of hard plugging that lie behind us. Conditions for travel were most unfavorable this year with snow and bitterly cold winds, rain, seas of mud, washed out bridges and roads throwing ever new obstacles in our path. On the very last day of our journey it appeared as though the elements had conspired in a final attempt to keep us from our immediate goal, with a heavy rain and the efforts of overloaded trucks to negotiate difficult dirt roads turning the long, lonesome stretches of the Kirkuk-Baghdad track into an endless strip of butterscotch pudding. That was the ultimate test, but the jeep stayed by us, and with careful handling brought our heavy load of equipment and extensive quantities of the slicky soils of Jordan, Syria and Iraq safely to the city of Harun al-Rashid, for which we are unusually grateful.
2. "We tackled the second desert leg of our eastward progress, that taking us from Palmyra to the town of Deir ez-Zor on the Euphrates and we missed the fork in track where you turn off for Deir, so landed in T-3, the nearest of the pumping stations on the pipeline from Iraq and then cut half an hour northward till we picked up the eastbound track. It was about a five hour run from T-3 to Deir ez-Zor, and we met not a single car the entire time, only occasional bequín tents and flocks.
3. "Fair weather favored us as we crossed the narrow Euphrates bridge and headed into the vast Jezireh, the region between Euphrates and Tigris bound as we thought for Ras el-Ain. The extent of the puddles on the desert track was definitely increasing on the run inland to Hassatche, but the day was clear and balmy and we seemed to be over the worst of our travel. We cleared with the Security Police at Hassatche, as required by our papers, and at their insistence took along as supercargo a driver who was to guide us through the intricate tracks toward Ras el-Ain in the valley of the Chabur River, the only Mesopotamian tributary of the Euphrates. Well, he guided us all right as far as he went--about half way--told us the rest was easy and left us to find out that a bridge we needed to cross had been washed out some weeks before, leaving us completely marooned, miles from anywhere. This was about 3:30 p.m., and darkness was not too far off.

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The boss of a little repair crew working on the rebuilding of some embankments explained that there was a succession of field tracks from farm village to farm village that we could follow and that would lead us to a place called Arrade (or some such) on the east-west road along the Turkish frontier. Some maps we had taken along from Jerusalem proved life savers in giving us a general sense of direction on this back country effort. We were in excellent farm land now with lots of natural water plus great quantities that had been brought in by rains during the past weeks, sweeping eastward along the southern face of the mountains of Turkey. We made Arrade when the sun was getting low and found it just a wide place on a road, and without gasoline supplies. So, for better or worse we headed further east along the Turkish frontier (instead of west toward our goal Ras el-Ain) toward Derbasiyeh and more gasoline.

4. "The main east-west road turned out to be a nightmare--torn up when wet by truck traffic that meanwhile had ceased entirely. So it was dusk when we arrived at the collection of flea-bitten mud-brick houses that is Derbasiyeh and asked our way to the gasoline supply depot (no pumps, of course).
5. "We struck out eastward, abandoning the Ras el-Ain project, but soon found that eastward progress along the road was also impossible since the maze of ruts carved in its bed by trucks and tractors and now hardened were all of two feet deep and could not be handled even by jeep. The shoulders and ditches were still water-covered and provided no alternative. So we returned to the gas station at Derbasiyeh and with the help of a native guide shook our way around on farm tracks to Oamishliyah, and from here on bumped our way over a cut stone sub-base to the frontier station of Tell Kotchek, where we arrived about 1 p.m. It took till 3p.m. before we were cleared and then we rolled happily into Iraq, all papers in order, finally making Mosul by 7 p.m.
6. "It was tough going for almost 100 miles of the distance from Mosul to Baghdad, but we came through plastered with mud and glory, the only casualty to the jeep having been that the step on the driver's side was wrenched off in ploughing through mud."

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